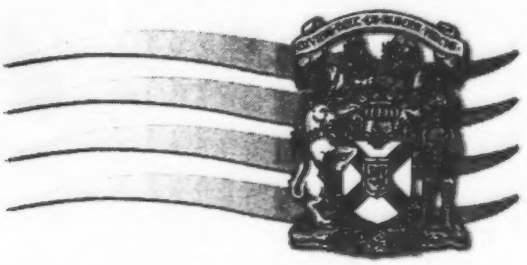
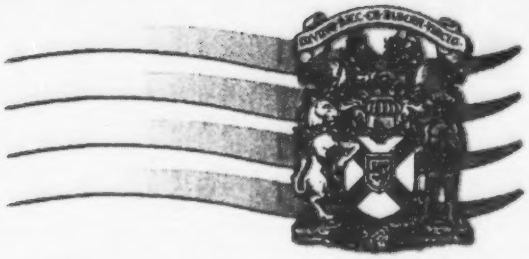
Highlights of the Speech from the Throne

Province of Nova Scotia



Second Session of the
Fifty-Eighth General Assembly

The Honourable Myra A. Freeman, B.A, B. Ed.
Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia



Second Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly

Government believes that nothing is more important to Nova Scotia's long-term economic health and social prosperity than helping our children become healthy, caring, and productive adults. To that end, it has identified key areas for action and investment, including:

- Expanding the Active Young Readers Program across all elementary grade levels from primary to grade six.
- Introducing new literacy tests at the grade-six level and sharing the results with parents.
- Introducing Nova Scotia's first province-wide Code of Conduct for Nova Scotia's public school system.
- Developing new approaches and providing new supports for students with special needs.
- Launching Youth Pathways and Transitions to help high school students bridge to community college and Nova Scotia's labour market.
- Expanding access to community college.
- Improving mental health services, particularly for children and adolescents.

- Introducing a comprehensive home visitation program for expectant mothers, new parents, and newborns.
- Increasing assistance to child care centres and expanding access to child care.
- Developing a province-wide strategy to promote active, healthy living.

Government is committed to ensuring that Nova Scotians have reliable, quality health care well into the future. Solid information, community involvement, support for health care professionals, and a greater focus on preventing disease and promoting wellness are key to making this possible.

Therefore, government will:

- Modernize assessment and admission criteria for nursing home placement.
- Invest in home care.
- Launch a nursing strategy to retain and recruit nurses.
- Introduce nurse practitioner legislation.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive tobacco control strategy.
- Provide a wellness fund to support Community Health Board wellness initiatives.
- Introduce a new Patient Navigation System for cancer patients and their doctors.
- Proceed with the second phase of the Clinical Services Planning Process.
- Improve patient care and system-wide planning through investments in information technology.

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This government believes in the principles of fairness, equity, and self-reliance. We have demonstrated that we are prepared to lead by example. In the weeks and months ahead we will continue to call on Ottawa to provide Nova Scotians with their full and fair share of benefits from the offshore. We will continue to aggressively pursue Nova Scotia's Campaign for Fairness.

This government is working hard to position Nova Scotia for economic success. This means modernizing government services, planning for Nova Scotia's future employment needs, and maximizing opportunities in emerging as well as foundation industries. To that end we will:

- Launch the Skills Agenda, a comprehensive assessment of new and developing job demands.
- Enhance and expand Nova Scotia's high-speed Internet connections.
- Enhance on-line business services by expanding the Nova Scotia Business Registry.
- Introduce new self-serve government service terminals in 19 locations.
- Launch Registry 2000 to create a modern electronic land registry.
- Increase funding for road improvements.
- Introduce a new highway signage policy.
- Place increased emphasis on Nova Scotia as a year-round tourism destination.
- Support export opportunities for our cultural producers and distributors.

- Continue to support farmers through existing federal-provincial cost-sharing programs.
- Implement an industrial benefits program.
- Pilot new ways for Nova Scotia companies to do business with government.
- Strengthen and streamline marketing initiatives through the Brand Nova Scotia initiative.
- Develop a new energy strategy to maximize benefits to consumers and the province.

Government is committed to enriching the quality of life in Nova Scotia. This means taking steps to protect Nova Scotians' health and safety, preserving the integrity of our natural environment, and improving our physical infrastructure. Government will:

- Improve emergency services through the Civic Addressing Project.
- Develop a comprehensive water quality and water quantity management strategy.
- Develop new approaches for addressing deficiencies in sewage management practices.
- Work with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners to reduce greenhouse gases.
- Implement the Rural and Semi-rural Inclusive Transportation Support Program.
- Work with communities to expand the Trans-Canada Trail System.
- Increase our investment in Crown land silviculture.
- Support drivers who voluntarily take safe-driving courses.

This government is determined to end Nova Scotia's costly dependence on borrowed money. We have set the course for a balanced budget in 2002–03. We will meet our budget targets as promised. And we will use new accountability measures to see that we do.

- New investments will be made in health and education information management systems.
- The financial management and policy planning arms of government will be brought together under Treasury and Policy Board.
- The scope and mandate of the Department of Human Resources will be extended to cover the broader public service.

Nova Scotia

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Speech from the Throne
Province of Nova Scotia

Thursday, March 22, 2001

Her Honour
The Honourable Myra A. Freeman, B.A., B. Ed.
Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia

For the Second Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly
Nova Scotia House of Assembly

Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, Guests: Welcome to the opening of the Second Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly.

As we set forth government's agenda for the near future, we pause to remember those whose passion for public service left a memorable mark on this province and on the lives of countless Nova Scotians. The late Eileen O'Connell, Harry How, and Hansen Dowell served their province with distinction. Their contribution to public life serves as a reminder to all who take their place in this historic chamber of the serious responsibility we individually and collectively bear as the elected representatives of the people of Nova Scotia.

And while not a native son, Pierre Elliott Trudeau will be remembered by Nova Scotians as one of the most colourful and dynamic leaders this country has ever seen. His passion for Canada, and his no-nonsense approach to those who would see it harmed, were indisputable.

As well as taking time to remember, we take time to celebrate a number of outstanding Nova Scotians whose achievements have brought them to the centre of the world's stage. Fiddling great and Grammy nominee Natalie MacMaster, 14-time provincial champion and three-time world curling contender Colleen Jones, and three-time Olympian and bronze medallist Steve Giles: each has given Nova Scotians reason to be proud they are our athletic and cultural ambassadors abroad.

And in this, *The International Year of Volunteers,* we celebrate the lesser-known but hugely important effort of every Nova Scotian who quietly takes the time to cuddle a sick baby, to stack the shelves of their local food bank, or to deliver a hot meal to a house-bound senior. In honour of the outstanding contribution tens of thousands of Nova Scotians make to their communities and their province year in and year out, and in recognition of the International Year of Volunteers, my government will introduce the *Order of Nova Scotia.* This prestigious honour will celebrate the value of community service, as well as recognize those individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of Nova Scotia.

My government extends an especially warm welcome to the new member for Halifax Fairview and the new member for Cape Breton North. We look forward to their determined efforts to help Nova Scotia move forward with a modern, progressive economy that appropriately responds to the needs and aspirations of all of its people, both now and in the future.

Healthy, Productive Children ... A Healthy, Productive Future

My government knows that the decisions we make today will have a profound impact on the kind of Nova Scotia we have tomorrow.

And nothing is more important to Nova Scotia's long-term economic health and social prosperity than helping our children become healthy, caring, productive adults.

Active Young Readers expanded

Over the course of the past year, my government has enhanced parental leave benefits for birth parents and adoptive parents, improved access to child care, supported more families and children through early intervention, combined the federal and provincial child benefits into a standard benefit for low-income families, provided new supports for children with autism-spectrum disorders, established Nova Scotia's first school supplies program for families on social assistance, and introduced the *Active Young Readers Program* for students from grade primary to grade three.

In the weeks and months ahead, we will focus more of our energies and more of our resources on building eager, young minds and healthy, active bodies.

My government believes that education is the foundation for Nova Scotia's current and future prosperity.

Nova Scotians have told us that they are concerned about the level of quality, the absence of certain standards, and the degree of accountability in our education system. They understandably want assurances that our students can compete throughout the world, confident in knowing they have an educational grounding that is second to none.

In the coming months, my government will bring forward a number of initiatives that focus on improving the quality, standards, and accountability of our education system from the grade primary level straight through to our post-secondary institutions.

We will start by expanding the Active Young Readers Program so that it not only helps children "learn to read" but gives them the confidence to "read to learn." Soon, all children across the elementary grade level, from grade primary to six, will have access to this important learning experience. And to ensure our early learning strategies are working effectively, we will test the literacy levels of all grade six students.

My government recognizes that the education of our children is a shared responsibility between 'home' and 'school'. Therefore, for the first time, the results of these tests will be openly shared with the parents of every child. Just as importantly, these results will be shared with teachers at the junior high level so struggling young readers can be supported to become successful young learners.

Nova Scotia's first School Code of Conduct

Every student, in every classroom, in every school must value and respect their fellow students, as well as the learning environment. Our schools have a responsibility to teach our students at an early age that unacceptable behaviour will be met with consequences that are acceptable to parents, teachers, and society. My government is committed to making our schools peaceful and productive places of learning. We will therefore implement Nova Scotia's first *Code of Conduct* for our public school system.

New support for special needs students

Students have a wide range of needs requiring different levels of support. My government knows that we cannot realistically meet all of the demands for new resources in one speech or in one budget, but we do know that every child must be valued, and every reasonable effort made to help each and every one of them personally grow and academically succeed. We will demonstrate our commitment to make this happen by investing in new approaches to help students with special needs.

Bridging the gap for High School students

Just as there are students who require different levels of classroom support, there are students with a wide range of talent, skills, and interests. Not all can be expected to follow the same academic path. Too many young Nova Scotians with lots of enthusiasm and loads of talent are falling through the cracks. My government will invest in their futures by launching the *Youth Pathways and Transitions Program.* This initiative will introduce the *Student Career Portfolio*, a

new approach for tracking each student's progress in acquiring the basic skills required for employment. It will be introduced in a number of grade 7, 8, and 9 classes this coming year and will be rolled out for all secondary students in future years. A second component of Youth Pathways and Transitions will provide students with the option of selecting high school courses that are linked to specific programs at the Nova Scotia Community College. This will allow students to make a smoother transition into community college and provide a clearer pathway to Nova Scotia's job market, including the knowledge economy and Nova Scotia's resource industries.

Increased access to community college

To the greatest extent possible, my government wants Nova Scotians to be the first in line to fill the jobs that are becoming available as a result of our growing economy. We will therefore open up more opportunities for Nova Scotians to go to community college and develop the skills they need to get a good job here at home.

As well as making key investments that support learning, my government will invest in the physical health and emotional well-being of our children.

We will begin by addressing the serious gaps that exist in the delivery of mental health services, particularly as they relate to children and adolescents. We will step up efforts to improve access to a wider range of integrated services, as close to home as possible.

New comprehensive Home Visitation Program

As a partner in the National Children's Agenda we will commit more resources to ensure more of our children get a good start in life. We will introduce a comprehensive *Home Visitation Program*, designed to provide one-on-one support to expectant parents, new parents, and newborns. When fully implemented, this new program will mean every new mother and every new baby, no matter where they live, will have the support of a public health nurse. It will also mean every family that requires ongoing support will get the support they need through a network of lay home visitors. Again, no matter where they live.

Expanded child care...increased support for centres

As well, my government will expand access to child care and supports to parents at the community level. We will also commit additional resources to existing licensed child-care centres. These two important initiatives speak to my government's belief that quality learning and social experiences at an early age help our children become caring and sharing adults.

When families break up, the children are the ones that suffer most. Helping families avoid legal conflict means everyone benefits, particularly the children. My government will continue to urge the federal government to expand the Family Division of the Supreme Court of Canada to all areas of the province. With its focus on counselling, conciliation, and mediation, this court helps families and children in crises by reducing the tension and the conflict that comes when families break down.

My government will also help more young Nova Scotians in conflict with the law become accountable for their actions. We will expand the *Restorative Justice Program*, paying particular attention to helping young Nova Scotians productively repair the harm they have imposed on their victims and on society.

Participating in sport, recreation, and fitness helps build healthier bodies and sharper minds. To encourage both young and old to become more active, we will work closely with our schools, Community Health Boards, municipal and national partners, as well as sport and recreation associations across the province, to develop an effective strategy that will provide Nova Scotians with more access to both indoor and outdoor sport and recreational activities.

These initiatives speak to my government's belief that the most important thing we can do for tomorrow is to invest in our children today.

Reliable, Sustainable, Evidenced-based Health Care

Twelve years ago, the Royal Commission on Health Care spoke of the urgent need to make critical changes to the health care system. The commission warned that unless fundamental changes were made in what services were delivered and how they were delivered, the system could eventually collapse under its own weight. Nova Scotia is perilously close to that happening. If health care costs continue to escalate at the levels witnessed throughout the 1990s, in just 10 years from now, the government will not be able to provide Nova Scotians with any other service. There will be no teachers, no child-care workers, no snowplough operators. My government is not prepared to let that happen, nor are we prepared to let Nova Scotians go without quality care.

Over the past year and a half, my government has made solid progress in gathering the information needed to support proper health planning. With the help of doctors, nurses, and the people who oversee the delivery of acute care services, we have thoroughly analysed clinical services at all of our hospitals. The results of this important and exhaustive undertaking will not only mean better, more predictable care for those who rely on Nova Scotia's health care system, it will mean those who pay for it—taxpayers—get better value for every health dollar spent.

Improving access to continuing care

My government recently piloted new efforts to make sure seniors most in need of long-term care are the first in line for long-term placement. The early results from our pilots demonstrate the enormous value of having solid information when planning future services. In the months and weeks ahead, my government will continue to gather the information necessary to ensure every Nova Scotian who needs care, gets the best care possible, not only now, but well into the future. We will continue to invest in fair approaches that simplify access to continuing care, making it easier for seniors to get the right care, at the right time, from the best care provider. We will do so by investing in home care and by modernizing our assessment and admission criteria for nursing homes throughout the province.

Investing in sustainable health care

My government will also proceed with phase two of the *Clinical Services Planning Process* to ensure the most effective delivery of long-term care and home care services. As well, we will invest in a new *Information Management System*. Information technology is critical to improving system-wide performance and for providing patients, doctors, and hospitals with easier and faster access to medical records. This vitally important investment will not only improve patient care, it will help us better monitor, adjust, and plan health services so they are sustainable over the long term.

More than anything else, the future of health services in Nova Scotia is dependent on securing the right number and mix of professionals for our province. We have made significant strides over the past year in recruiting new physicians to communities throughout Nova Scotia, but there are still too many Nova Scotians without a family doctor, still too many regions in need of specialists. My government recently announced a debt assistance program for medical students who set up practice in under-serviced areas. We will continue to investigate innovative, cost-effective ways to ensure that every community that needs a doctor gets one.

Perhaps the most significant challenge Nova Scotia faces, along with virtually every other province in Canada, is recruiting new nurses. Again, over the past year and a half, my government has worked hard to address the many challenges of retaining those we have and recruiting those we need. We have converted part-time positions to full-time, created the position of Nurse Policy Advisor, funded new nursing seats, and introduced a new co-op program for nursing students. We recognize, however, that more needs to be done.

Supporting our nurses

My government will act on the advice it received directly from nurses. We will begin implementing Nova Scotia's first *Nursing Strategy*. This includes, expanding professional development opportunities, addressing workplace issues, and providing tangible support for nurses who relocate to Nova Scotia. As well, we will introduce legislation that recognizes the new and critically important role that *Nurse Practitioners* can play as part of a Nova Scotia's modern team of health care professionals.

New strategy to reduce smoking

My government is committed to reducing Nova Scotia's excessively high rate of smoking, as well as the huge costs it imposes on our health care system. As part of our initiatives to encourage healthy living, we will introduce a *Comprehensive Tobacco Control Strategy*, aimed at reducing consumption, limiting exposure to second-hand smoke, and creating awareness of the deadly and costly effects of smoking. The *Premier's Youth Advisory Council on Smoking* will play a key role in developing effective strategies for reducing adolescent and teen smoking.

My government was pleased to pass legislation that finally gave Community Health Boards a mandate to help guide the future direction of health care. In recognition of the important contribution these volunteer boards make to improving the health and well-being of their communities, we will establish a *Wellness Fund* that will allow many of their ideas and wellness plans to be put into action.

New supports for cancer patients and their doctors

Almost every Nova Scotian has been either directly or indirectly affected by cancer. In co-operation with *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, we will introduce a new *Patient Navigation System* to ensure Nova Scotians with cancer get the information, the encouragement, and the supports they need, from diagnosis, through all stages of treatment, to recovery. An important feature of this significant new initiative will be my government's effort to make specialist reports available to family physicians within 48 hours. We are determined to make early treatment ... early cure a reality for more Nova Scotians.

We are determined to give communities a greater voice in shaping the future direction of health care and investing more in wellness promotion and disease prevention.

Individual Independence, Community Sustainability, and Provincial Self-reliance

Nova Scotia's future prosperity starts with individual Nova Scotians; it will be strengthened with every community that grows; and it will be assured when Nova Scotia gets to keep a fair share of its offshore benefits.

Modern, progressive changes to our welfare system mean more Nova Scotian families will achieve independence, so they can contribute more to their communities.

Campaign for Fairness

The fair exchange of service between the province and its municipal partners will help sustain and strengthen struggling communities, so they can contribute more to Nova Scotia.

Winning the battle for Nova Scotia's full and fair share of revenues from our offshore will assure our future as a 'have' province, so we can contribute more to a stronger Canada.

Each of these important initiatives speaks to the values we take pride in as Nova Scotians and Canadians: fairness, equity, and self-reliance.

My government asks nothing more of Ottawa than we are prepared to do for our citizens and our communities.

The changes we are making to our social assistance system mean Nova Scotians will get to keep more of the benefits they receive as they make the transition from welfare to work. We want them to land on their feet and stay on their feet.

Nova Scotia is simply asking Ottawa for the chance to land and stay on its feet.

The changes we have proposed to provincial-municipal relations mean communities that have been struggling to provide basic services have a fair chance to gain a foothold in Nova Scotia's new economy. We want all of our communities to prosper and to be strong partners in a modern, progressive, fair-minded Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is simply asking Ottawa for the opportunity to be a strong partner in a modern, progressive fair-minded Canada.

My government will continue to lead by example.

We are not only talking about the principles of fairness, equity, and self-reliance, we are embracing them in our actions. We do so in the firm and principled belief that independent Nova Scotians will help build stronger communities, stronger communities will help build a more self-reliant Nova Scotia, and a more self-reliant Nova Scotia will build a more prosperous Canada.

Embracing the principles of fairness, equity, and self-reliance

A Modern Progressive Economy Supported by a Modern Progressive Government

Nova Scotia is on the verge of economic resurgence. The huge potential of our offshore; our growing knowledge-based economy; our abundant resources; our unique culture, rich history, and natural beauty; but above all else, the resilience and resourcefulness of our people, give us the means to finally shed our 'have-not' status and to become one of Canada's most dynamic and progressive provinces.

My government will not squander the trust of Nova Scotians, nor will we put at peril their opportunity for a better future.

We know it is our duty to demonstrate the leadership needed today to bring about real economic gains and meaningful social progress tomorrow.

We have made steady progress over the past year. We introduced Nova Scotia's first School for Adult Learning; and released *Opportunities for Prosperity*, Nova Scotia's first economic growth strategy in over a decade. We opened up more of

Nova Scotia's offshore to oil and gas development; introduced the country's first fully functioning, on-line government tendering service; and invested more in road improvements. We supported silviculture development; assisted Nova Scotia farmers challenged by drought; developed a strategic tourism marketing plan; and introduced new efforts to market our cultural products abroad. We also connected more schools, libraries, and communities to the Internet, and more businesses to on-line government services.

But again, more needs to be done.

My government is committed to seeing that our natural advantages are used to Nova Scotians' maximum advantage.

We will begin where it all counts—with our young people.

Nova Scotia's growing economy means new opportunities are opening up in a wide variety of trades and professions: the offshore, high-tech industries, construction trades, life sciences, as well as the traditional resource industries that helped found our province. All of these industries present a new, but welcome challenge: the need to find skilled workers with a range of new talents.

My government believes that, with the right supports, it's a challenge young Nova Scotians can meet head on.

Ensuring Nova Scotians are first in line for new job opportunities

To see that they do, we will launch Nova Scotia's *Skills Agenda.* In co-operation with business, labour, industry, and our partners in education, we will undertake a comprehensive assessment of new and developing job demands.

Over time, we will put a comprehensive, forward-thinking plan in place to make sure that young Nova Scotians aren't packing their bags to leave—they're packing their bags to come home.

My government will also work with our private-sector partners to see that more Nova Scotia businesses, libraries, schools, and homes have better and faster access to telecommunication services. We are enhancing Nova Scotia's high-speed *Internet* connections and in the process linking 18 new communities, mostly rural communities, to new educational and business opportunities.

Improving service to business

My government is committed to eliminating red tape, creating a positive climate for investment, and making Nova Scotia an attractive place to do business. We have invested, and will continue to invest, in the country's most innovative and cost-effective approach for providing service to business, the *Nova Scotia Business Registry*. This on-line service, launched last year, will be expanded over the coming year, making it easier and faster for business to deal with government. We want Nova Scotia businesses concentrating more on building their own success and less on dealing with needless red tape. Over the next four years, we expect that up to 80 per cent of all business transactions with government will be available on line.

Improving service to rural Nova Scotians

My government is also committed to improving access to government services for Nova Scotians living in rural areas of the province. We will work to ensure that, no matter where they live, Nova Scotians have easier access to a wider range of e-government or front-line services. *Service Nova Scotia Express* will soon introduce service terminals in 19 locations throughout Nova Scotia. This, along with the expansion of front-line Registry of Motor Vehicle services into five more counties, will put Nova Scotians who live outside of Nova Scotia's urban areas on a more level footing when it comes to accessing government services.

We will also launch the *Registry 2000 Initiative*, to convert our 250-year-old paper system into a modern electronic land registry. This multi-year process will be a milestone in our efforts to streamline real property transactions, making it possible to easily search land records from any computer terminal or any registry office in the province.

One of the most serious challenges facing government, and one of the most serious impediments to our economic growth, is the state of our roads and highways. My government is determined to see Nova Scotians travel on safer highways, more tourists come to our province, and more businesses invest in Nova Scotia's future prosperity. Last year, my government increased spending on Nova Scotia's rural roads and secondary highways. We will increase that investment once again this year. We will also continue to call on the federal government to return a fair portion of the $130 million it collects every year from Nova Scotians through gasoline taxes.

As well, my government will release a *Ten-Year Needs Assessment Study* that will assure Nova Scotians of our commitment to plan and build highways based solely on the most urgent need.

New signage policy

As the gateways to Nova Scotia communities, our highways provide visitors with critical information on local services and attractions. Drawing upon the input received through extensive public consultations, my government will implement a *New Advertising Signage Policy* that will enhance the quality and effectiveness of business advertisements, while at the same time leaving visitors to our province with a positive and lasting impression of Nova Scotia's wonderful scenery.

Supporting our tourism and culture industries

This is one of many initiatives we are undertaking to reach our goal of making tourism a $1.5-billion industry by the end of our mandate. Our efforts to aggressively market Nova Scotia, in true partnership with Nova Scotia's Tourism Partnership Council, will help us reach our goal. To ensure that we reach or surpass our target, we are placing increased emphasis on promoting Nova Scotia as a year-round tourism destination. As well, we will continue to support the innovative investments we made last year in the tourism potential of our smaller communities.

Our work with communities does not stop there. We also recognize the potential of our cultural producers and distributors in helping our economy grow and our culture flourish. We will continue to build on their success with new investments that support growth and opportunity in our cultural industries.

Our partnerships with industry do not begin or end with our tourism and culture industries.

My government believes that we increase our opportunities for success when different levels of government come together with communities, our Regional Development Authorities, and the private sector to support a common objective. This year, we will bring these partnerships together to implement an aggressive plan for advancing Nova Scotia's digital economy, from broad-band connectivity to e-government.

Enhancing opportunities for Nova Scotian companies to do business with government

We will also establish the *Nova Scotia Business Opportunities Initiative.* This new initiative will pilot new approaches to enhance opportunities for Nova Scotian companies to do business with government. It will also develop and implement a new *Industrial Benefits Program* that will strike a fair balance between rural and urban business needs and opportunities.

My government will also continue to work hand in glove with the people of Industrial Cape Breton to bring about a modern economy sustained by modern business and industry.

We will continue to invest in the promise of its people and the economic potential of the area through the prudent use of the *Cape Breton Growth Fund.* We will also more aggressively market Cape Breton's rich talent and huge potential far and wide.

It goes without saying, Nova Scotia's traditional resource industries are the backbone of rural Nova Scotia. Regardless of the new prosperity that oil and gas will bring, or the new opportunities the knowledge economy offers, farming, fishing, mining, and milling will always be vitally important to our economy and to the future of rural Nova Scotia.

These sectors provide well-paying jobs, continue to adopt new technologies, and offer important lessons for some of our new growth industries.

My government will continue to work with our industry partners to see that we grow our economy through the prudent use of our resources, the proper use of new technologies, and the value that can be added to many of our products.

Investing in healthy forests

To ensure future generations have access to healthy forests, my government will implement the remaining elements of Nova Scotia's *Forestry Strategy* and introduce new regulations to protect wildlife habitat. As well, through the silviculture pilot project announced in the fall, we will continue to work co-operatively with woodlot owners and the industry to ensure our forests are sustainable for the future. With that same goal in mind, we will make an additional investment in silviculture on Crown land.

Assistance to farmers

To support Nova Scotia's farmers, my government will continue to provide assistance through the *Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance Program* and through the *Net Income Stabilization Account.* These two programs are vital to helping Nova Scotian farms survive weather-related losses and market-driven fluctuations. As well, we will open the *Agriculture Development Institute,* an innovative and co-operative partnership that provides farmers with a wide range of professional expertise. We will also support the industry by expanding the curriculum at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College to include the emerging fields of life sciences, environmental engineering and biology, organic farming, value-added products, and aquaculture.

Our fishermen, and the coastal communities they help sustain, are understandably worried about the impact oil and gas development will have on their livelihood. My government is committed to working with representatives from both of these important industries to ensure one does not displace the other. We will insist that modern exploration and development approaches be followed and that the oil and gas industry respect the value of the fishery in any future development.

New marketing efforts

To support the continued growth of farming, fishing, and forestry in Nova Scotia, my government will introduce *Brand Nova Scotia.* This new initiative will streamline and strengthen the marketing activities of government departments, as well as the private sector. It will develop common messages and themes that will promote Nova Scotian products, as quality products, both at home and abroad.

Negotiated solutions

My government knows that questions over the treaty rights of Nova Scotia's Aboriginal peoples have created tension and court challenges that could have serious consequences for thousands of Nova Scotians who make their livelihood from fishing or forestry. My government understands it has a duty both to uphold our legal obligations and to ensure that all of our citizens have equal opportunity to earn a livelihood from our natural resources. We believe that mutually acceptable agreements can provide a strong foundation for certainty and stability for all Nova Scotians. We will continue to try and bring about negotiated solutions as an alternative to the tensions resulting form court challenges.

Maximizing benefits through new Energy Strategy

While we look forward to the incredible opportunities oil and gas will bring to Nova Scotia, we are mindful of the need to prudently plan for Nova Scotia's future energy needs. With the help of the *Premier's Council on Energy,* my government will soon release a discussion paper that will be used to develop a new *Energy Strategy* that recognizes Nova Scotia's new and changing energy needs. Nova Scotia is starting to be recognized around the world as a source of significant energy resources. The Energy Strategy will be instrumental in identifying new strategies for maximizing benefits to Nova Scotia consumers, to communities, and to our province in the years ahead.

My government has set a busy agenda. We are working hard to take advantage of the momentum that has been building. We are working hard to position Nova Scotia for success.

Protecting and Enriching Nova Scotia's Quality of Life

Safe communities, clean drinking water, pure air, safe roads, our history, heritage, and community spirit—all of these and more contribute to our sense of pride in being Nova Scotians.

My government is committed to ensuring the quality of life enjoyed by Nova Scotians is enriched.

To protect the quality of our land and wildlife habitat we are working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to set aside more land to be preserved. We passed legislation to protect agricultural marshlands. We invested in reforestation; expanded provincial parklands; introduced Nova Scotia's first Disaster Relief Policy; and, with the enthusiastic support of Nova Scotians, achieved the landmark goal of diverting more than 50 per cent of Nova Scotia's solid waste away from our landfills.

To protect the quality of our water, we introduced more stringent regulations for monitoring and reporting on all public drinking water supplies, providing the most extensive coverage in Canada. And, along with our federal and municipal partners, we committed millions of dollars to upgrade water and sewer services throughout the province.

To help Nova Scotians feel safer in their communities, we have taken a tough stand and a national leadership role in dealing with home invasion and introduced a new *Community Outreach Program* to educate seniors and others on how to effectively deal with situations that put their safety at risk. We are working across government to provide better support to families in crises and to identify opportunities for improving our response to family violence. We have also begun the Civic Addressing Project. This project will provide precise digital maps to police, firefighters, first responders, and paramedics so that they can more accurately locate and more quickly respond to emergency calls.

Improving emergency services

In keeping with our efforts to ensure all Nova Scotians have access to legal services, my government will continue to urge Ottawa to restore funding for legal aid.

We will continue to build on this beginning.

New clean drinking water plan

My government recognizes that the tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario, raised concerns about the quality of drinking water here at home. To provide even greater protection for Nova Scotians from a similar tragedy, my government will soon release a comprehensive water management plan for both water quality protection and water quantity management.

My government will also work to address deficiencies in sewage management practices by developing a strategy for dealing with untreated sewage, outdated treatment plants, and malfunctioning on-site systems.

We will also invest more in healthy forests and work with communities throughout Nova Scotia to expand our Trans Canada Trail system.

As well, we will expand our solid waste management efforts by negotiating new stewardship agreements with industry and by implementing the recently announced agreement on medical sharps.

Commitment to reduce greenhouse gases

In addition, we will continue to work with the federal government and our provincial and territorial partners to develop a workable and effective strategy for the reduction of greenhouse gases, which strikes a reasonable and fair balance between preserving our environment and protecting our economy.

To protect the travelling public we will introduce regulations covering long-distance small van carriers, and we will support older drivers who voluntarily participate in safe driving courses.

Expanding Accessible Transportation

Just as we have been working to make public buildings more accessible to Nova Scotians with disabilities, we will continue to work to make our transportation system more accessible. We will implement the *Rural and Semi-Rural Inclusive Transportation Support Program*, which will provide Nova Scotians with disabilities greater access to transportation services in the less-populated areas of the province.

My government will also work to ensure all Nova Scotians are protected by effective fire prevention laws. We will strike a *Select Committee of the Legislature* to review proposed changes to the Fire Prevention Act and seek input from municipalities, volunteer fire departments, and others in the development of a new and effective fire prevention law, and any other issues of concern.

These initiatives will help Nova Scotians feel secure in knowing their government is taking the necessary steps to protect their health and safety, to preserve the integrity of our natural environment, and to improve our physical infrastructure.

The Deficit and Debt ... Nova Scotia's Great Divide

The single greatest challenge confronting any government is to leave future generations with less to worry about and more to be thankful for. For this to happen, Nova Scotia must end its costly dependence on borrowed money. The cost of paying the interest on our debt will soon be $1 billion per year. This is money we can't use to invest in our schools, our hospitals, our roads, or more importantly, in a better future for our children and grandchildren. That is why my government has made eliminating the deficit an urgent priority. The deficit is Nova Scotia's great divide. As long as it exists, Nova Scotia will never be able to claim we are making real headway as a 'have' province ... we will never be able to say that the future of our children is secure.

On target for a balanced budget

My government has set the course for a balanced budget by the end of fiscal 2002–2003. We will not waiver. We will end deficit financing once and for all. We will do it by using the country's most advanced accounting principles and by introducing new measures of accountability. More importantly, we will do so by demonstrating we have the right balance of heart and spine.

Protecting Taxpayers through Improved Accountability

For accountability to be more than a buzzword, there must be open reporting structures, a clear understanding of expectations, and consequences for indifference.

My government expects that every department, agency, board, and commission will treat every taxpayer with respect and every tax dollar with care.

Last year, we introduced legislation that held government to a new standard of accountability.

The Financial Measures Act established in law the requirement for government to openly account for its progress in meeting its program, policy, and financial objectives. This year we will publish a *Corporate Business Plan* that will not only establish the priorities of government, but the outcomes and targets we expect to meet.

New Accountability measures

As well, legislation establishing Nova Scotia's District Health Authorities requires more vigorous financial controls, including regular and timely updates to government on their spending priorities.

Legislation was also passed to ensure that our economic development efforts are based on sound business principles and not political expediency. *Nova Scotia Business Inc.*, a new agency at arm's length from government, will soon make day-to-day investment decisions. This new agency will be guided by a strict framework of accountability that requires open reporting on every transaction it makes.

My government also brought together under one roof the policy planning and financial management arms of government. This will ensure program planning is directly tied to financial accountability. Treasury and Policy Board will soon have the oversight needed to more effectively control spending across the civil service.

We have also developed an accountability framework for community-based social agencies that receive core funding from the province. While we recognize and support the important contribution these agencies make to their communities and to our province, we believe that government grants to social agencies must be based on more than history, on more than good intentions, and never on political connections. They must be based on demonstrated need, solid planning, and measurable outcomes.

My government has also, for the first time, started working with the continuing care sector to introduce a common set of business-planning tools designed to help our long-term care facilities maximize efficiencies and better plan their operations in future.

And, as promised, we started the process of examining the role, function, cost, value, and standards of accountability of virtually every agency in government. We will eliminate those that are no longer relevant and merge those of like function. We promised to make government more efficient, and we are committed to that end. Legislation to reduce the number of agencies, boards, and commissions will be introduced both this spring and fall.

These are important first steps, but government still has a distance to go in improving accountability for every tax dollar spent.

New investments in information management systems in both health and education will make it possible for government to identify spending areas that need adjustment and to more accurately predict future costs. But information management systems alone will not guarantee that taxpayers' dollars are spent on Nova Scotians' priorities.

Ensuring the fair and consistent expenditure of tax dollars

My government will therefore extend the scope and mandate of the Human Resources Department to cover the broader public sector. Legislation creating the *Public Service Commission* will be introduced to ensure the fair and consistent expenditure of taxpayers' dollars across the broad spectrum of government-funded services.

Conclusion

Today we have outlined the vision, values, principles, and priorities of my government.

But vision and values, principles and priorities do not guarantee good government.

It's action that counts.

Nova Scotians will quickly see the words and the commitments contained in this document turn to action.

And over time, they will see my government's vision of Nova Scotia as a 'have' province become a reality.

We know we cannot realistically meet every need.

We never expect to meet every want.

We do, however, want Nova Scotians to know the kind of future we believe in, the principles we will stand tall for, and the priorities we will invest in:

- healthy, caring, productive children
- reliable, quality, essential services
- a modern, progressive economy
- the fair and equitable distribution of opportunities
- accountable, fiscally responsible government
- a better quality of life for all Nova Scotians

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God bless the Queen.